

“The Aesthetics of Structural Violence”¹

An Art Project

Assignment: We will have explored the many ways in which Hansberry made specific aesthetic choices to portray structural injustice as it manifests itself in the form of racialized segregation during the Civil Rights Era. Thus, for this project, you are going to create your own art to lend expression to structural violence. It will consist of a four-minute presentation and can be a rap, a poem, a dance, a painting, or drawing, etc. During those four minutes, you must present your artistic creation, calling attention to the literary, as well as the political and historical representations of structural violence. You must also disclose which of the four attributes of the “aesthetics of segregation” you are applying.

Content:

In “Something Like War,” literary critic Michelle Gordon makes the case that Hansberry uses the play as an aesthetic representation of segregationist ideals, practices, and their consequences. She provides four main attributes that define “the aesthetics of segregation”:

- 1. Evidence of systemic exploitation and its human costs;**
- 2. Prophecy of explosive black rage;**
- 3. Demonstration of black resistance to the dehumanizing effects of segregation; and**
- 4. The presence or awareness of the violence that maintains color lines and social inequality (126).**

An example of “evidence of systematic exploitation and its human costs” occurs through Hansberry’s explication of Travis playing with the rat, as they pose a threat to the health of the community. Mrs. Johnson’s prophecies would be evidence of “the presence or awareness of the violence that maintains color lines and social inequality.”

1. Thus, you will first choose **one** of the four attributes of structural violence that you desire to bring to life through art. Be sure you are able to explain how you’ve chosen to aesthetically portray this attribute.
2. You will also incorporate the political/historical context discussed, such as Red Lining, Contract Deals, the Legislation, etc. Incorporate at least **two** examples.
3. Finally, you will include at least **three** references to the play. However, your art project can be situated within the contemporary moment – so long as it is an illustration of structural violence.

Presentation:

¹ Title taken from Michelle Gordon’s concept, “The Aesthetics of Segregation,” discussed in her article “Somewhat Like War: The Aesthetics of Segregation, Black Liberation, and *A Raisin in the Sun*,” wherein she discusses the ways in which Hansberry uses art to depict and critique the various causes and effects of segregation (126).

- Should be 4 minutes; if you are performing, leave room to explain all three categories. I would suggest splitting the time. But if you draw a picture, you would use the entire four minutes to explain all three categories.
- If you are performing, be sure to observe social distancing guidelines.
- Be sure that you rehearse. You will be allotted one do-over; you don't have to memorize anything, but please don't read from a paper or script.
- In the event that the Pandemic shifts or you become ill, plan to present via Zoom, if you are physically capable.

Grading:

I will use the following areas to evaluate your project:

Content: I will be listening for how well you met and explained the criteria for the assignment: one of the four attributes, the inclusion of three literary references from the text, and two political/historical references.

The Art: Energy and effort expended on the actual art. Stick figures won't cut it.

Presentation: Are you engaging, clear and "articulate,"² and organized.

Due Date: 9/9

² Your project might require you to be intentionally inarticulate. If so, that should be explained. Perhaps "intelligible" is a better word?